

Message Text

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PAGE 01 CANBER 08507 230136Z

71

ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7144

INFO AMCONSUL BRISBANE

USDEL MTN GENEVA UNN

USMISSION GATT GENEVA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

USMISSION OECD PARIS

AMCONSUL PERTH

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 8507

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ETRD, AS

SUBJ: NEW FRASER MINISTRY: SOME TRADE POLICY IMPLICATIONS

REF: CANBERRA 8437 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: NEW DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS
WILL APPARENTLY HAVE IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING POLICY
GUIDANCE OF INDUSTRIES ASSISTANCE COMMISSION, IN TARIFF AREA.
IMPLICATIONS OF SHAPE OF NEW MINISTRY IN OTHER ECONOMIC FIELDS
REMAIN TO BE SEEN. END SUMMARY

2. IN REFTEL, EMBASSY REPORTED LINE-UP OF NEW FRASER MINISTRY
ANNOUNCED DECEMBER 18. ALTHOUGH FULL POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF
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PAGE 02 CANBER 08507 230136Z

FAIRLY SWEEPING REORGANIZATION OF GOA ENTAILED, OF COURSE, HAVE

HARDLY BEGUN TO BECOME APPARENT, WE BELIEVE THE CREATION OF ONE DEPARTMENT IN PARTICULAR WORTH COMMENTING UPON AT THIS POINT. THIS IS DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS (DBCA) WHOSE MINISTER IS 36-YEAR OLD SYDNEY LAWYER ELECTED TO PARLIAMENT 18 MONTHS AGO, JOHN W. HOWARD. PERHAPS MORE SIGNIFICANTLY, PERMANENT HEAD WILL BE ALAN CARMODY, A VETERAN PUBLIC SERVANT LONG INVOLVED IN TRADE AND TARIFF MATTERS WITH A REPUTATION FOR STRONG BIAS TOWARD PROTECTION OF AUSTRALIAN INDUSTRY. CARMODY, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, WILL RETAIN POSITION AS COMPTROLLER-GENERAL OF CUSTOMS HELD SINCE 1966.

3. NEW DEPARTMENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES REPORTEDLY WILL INCLUDE CUSTOMS, EXCISE AND TARIFF MATTERS (INCLUDING SOME MEASURE OF POLICY SUPERVISION OF INDUSTRIES ASSISTANCE COMMISSION (IAC), TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE AUTHORITY AND TEXTILES AUTHORITY); THE TRADE PRACTICES COMMISSION; THE PRICES JUSTIFICATION TRIBUNAL (WHICH, DESPITE FRASER CAMPAIGN STATEMENTS, IS LIKELY TO BE RETAINED IN SOME FORM); BANKRUPTCY, PATENT AND COPYRIGHT MATTERS; CONSUMER AFFAIRS FUNCTIONS; AND FUTURE LEGISLATION ON SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE MATTERS.

4. DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL MINISTER OF STATE, TO WHICH IAC AND RELATED ORGANIZATIONS FORMERLY REPORTED, HAS BECOME DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES UNDER NEW MINISTER, SENATOR R.G. WITHERS, AND SAME PERMANENT HEAD, P.J. LAWLER. WE UNDERSTAND IT RETAINS PROTECTION POLICY DIVISION, HOWEVER, ALTHOUGH IMPORTANCE OF ITS ROLE VIS-A-VIS DBCA NOT YET KNOWN.

5. OTHER ECONOMIC DEPARTMENTS OF U.S. POLICY INTEREST AT THIS POINT APPEAR ONLY TO HAVE EXPERIENCED NAME CHANGES. MINERALS AND ENERGY IS NOW NATIONAL RESOURCES, AGRICULTURE AGAIN BECOMES PRIMARY INDUSTRY; MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY IS NOW INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE; AND IMMIGRATION AND LABOR HAS BEEN SPLIT INTO TWO DEPARTMENTS, EMPLOYMENT AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AND IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC AFFAIRS. CONSIDERABLE REALIGNMENT OF FUNCTIONS WITHIN AND AMONG THESE AND OTHER DEPARTMENTS IS UNDERWAY, WE UNDERSTAND, AND WE WILL ATTEMPT TO KEEP WASHINGTON INFORMED OF MOST SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS AS THEY OCCUR.

6. ONE CONSEQUENCE OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DBCA
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PAGE 03 CANBER 08507 230136Z

UNDOUBTEDLY WILL BE TO REDUCE INFLUENCE OF IAC UNDER ITS OUTSPOKEN CHAIRMAN AND FREE TRADE ADVOCATE, ALF RATTIGAN (WHO IN ANY EVENT IS NEARING RETIREMENT). THIS WOULD BE ENTIRELY IN ACCORD WITH FRASER SLOGAN ENUNCIATED DURING CAMPAIGN, "JOBS NOT DOGMA". END COMMENT.
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